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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 002840

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/19/2014

TAGS: PREL ECON PTER PREF CO EC

SUBJECT: ECUADOR PRESIDENT GUTIERREZ VISITS COLOMBIA

Classified By: Political Counselor E. Alex Lee, Reasons: 1.4 B & D.

11. (SBU) Summary: In a two-day visit to Colombia, Ecuador's President Lucio Gutierrez met with President Alvaro Uribe, FM Carolina Barco, Bogota Mayor Lucho Garzon, and business leaders; spoke to a joint session of Congress; and was honored with Colombia's highest medal. Border control, immigration, and trade were the public themes of the visit. While many issues between the two nations are thorny, the two heads of state enjoy an amicable relationship. Gutierrez made a surprise endorsement of reelection for Uribe. End summary.

12. (SBU) President Lucio Gutierrez made his first official visit to Colombia March 16-17. Uribe and Gutierrez signed a 44 point joint declaration (emailed to WHA/AND) which, inter alia, called for additional efforts to combat terrorism, information sharing along the border, and a new association agreement between the Andean Pact and Mercosur. Uribe and Gutierrez also announced installation of a Colombian Marine Corps base at the confluence of the San Miguel and Putumayo Rivers and the continuation of stationing GOC citizen soldiers (soldados campesinos) along the border. Gutierrez was circumspect regarding the capture of FARC leader "Simon Trinidad" in Quito in late December. Gutierrez recognized the problem of flow of arms from Ecuador to Colombia, but stressed that the weapons were of foreign origin. (Note: Gutierrez's comment spoke to GOC public speculation last year that a rocket used in a FARC assassination attempt in Bogota came from an Ecuadorian Army arsenal. End Note.)

13. (SBU) Uribe formally thanked Gutierrez for humanitarian protection for Colombians seeking refuge in Ecuador. (Comment: During a PRM visit in early March to Ecuador, a GOE Foreign Ministry official lamented that the GOC had never publicly thanked Ecuador for the assistance they have provided to Colombian citizens seeking refuge. End Comment.) Gutierrez lamented that undocumented Colombians working in Ecuador were exposed to exploitation. (Comment: The flow of asylum seekers from Colombia to Ecuador this year is 900 per month, down from 1200 per month last year but still up from 12002. End Comment.) The Presidents agreed to take the following steps to address migration and refugee issues:

--Beginning April 1, Colombians entering Ecuador will be required to present a document verifying their good standing with the GOC, after a security background check is conducted.

--Beginning December 31, 2005, Colombians will be required to present an Andean passport, or, failing that, a Colombian passport.

--After analyzing the large displacement of Colombians to Ecuador, both Presidents will request that international organizations provide assistance to this population, including arranging voluntary return to Colombia. The GOC's Social Solidarity Network, which coordinates assistance to the displaced, will assist them in Colombia.

14. (SBU) Colombia is Ecuador's second largest trading partner, and Gutierrez expressed hope that Ecuador's bilateral trade deficit might be reduced. In a speech to local businessmen, Gutierrez asked them to buy Ecuadorian products. He said that he hoped to see Colombian investment in oil production, hydroelectric development, agriculture, highways, and tourism. GOC MFA Director of Multilateral Economic, Social, and Environmental Affairs, Ambassador Fabio Ocasiones, characterized the Presidents' agreement to work toward lowering the cost of electricity as one of the visit's most important outcomes. Ocasiones explained that in the two-way market for electricity, Ecuador is the primary consumer and that Colombia charges more per unit sold. According to Ocasiones, Ecuador will be the primary beneficiary of the agreement. At the same meeting with

businessmen, Gutierrez unexpectedly endorsed reelection for Uribe.

15. (C) Comment: The December Simon Trinidad arrest was a major boost for Ecuador in the minds of both the GOC and the Colombian public. In more than one meeting with us during the last two months, President Uribe praised Gutierrez for the arrest and stressed that while working-level strains continued, he and Gutierrez maintained a strong and cordial relationship. Regarding illegal flow of arms, in a private discussion with poloff, Ocasiones (protect) expressed concern that some of the 8,000 Ecuadorian troops stationed near the border are currently involved in the trafficking of arms and chemical precursors.

DRUCKER

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